



## Book Discussions: Something for everyone?

By Katie Doherty  
Director of Learning Resources,  
New Hampshire Community  
Technical College - Berlin

These days I seem to hear about a different book discussion group wherever I turn in New Hampshire. There are groups for whole cities (Concord, et al.), regions such as the Mountain Washington Valley, and for specific groups (kids, teens, homeschoolers, seniors), although adults make up the bulk of book groups both in New Hampshire and across the country. And they are happening in an amazing range of venues: television (Oprah, etc.), radio (NHPR's recent Granite State Stories have been very popular), the Internet, people's homes, bookstores, and in scores of libraries across New Hampshire.

What accounts for their popularity? Sherry Evans, Head of Public Services at the Portsmouth Public Library who has written an article on the subject for *Public Libraries* ("But I Only Want to Read Books with Happy Endings," November/December 2003, p. 347-349), described a book group at her library: "People love to talk about books and have someone else lead the way. They love hearing different points of view and seeing a book from another angle. Often I hear, 'I would not have finished this book except for the book group, but I'm so glad I did'." Book groups help people connect with colleagues, friends, and neighbors as well as people from around the coun-

try and the world. It seems that people yearn to slow down a bit and talk about books.

Book groups have a long history. Mickey Pearlman in *What to Read* tells that a group of women in Charlestown, Massachusetts in 1813 formed a book club and in 1831 the Female and Literary Society was started by a group of African American women in Philadelphia. Starting in the 1870s and reaching their peak in 1914 with 500,000 members across the country, the Chautauqua Literary and Scientific Circles met to discuss books. Robert Maynard Hutchins and Mortimer Adler of the University of Chicago came up with an idea to encourage people to read the classics and in 1947 the Great Books Foundation was formed. The foundation publishes inexpensive editions of works by Shakespeare and others and encourages groups to form to discuss the Great Books and even runs training sessions for discussion group leaders. In 1962, the foundation added Junior Great Books for children. There are thousands of Great Books groups around the country including seven here in New Hampshire.

Bookstores around the state, from the very small to the very large, have book groups. While many are open to the general public such as the one at Gibson's Bookstore in Concord, there are specialized ones as well. The Toadstool Bookshop in Milford has a reading group for homeschoolers in grades four through six. While some bookstores run their

own reading discussions, some like the Wonderland Bookstore in Gorham, are host to others' groups. In addition to their own book discussions, Wonderland also hosts the local AAUW (American Association of University Women) chapter's book discussions twice a year.

The N.H. Community Technical College-Berlin Fortier Library and the Berlin Public Library have a 25-year history of co-sponsoring book discussions in the evening for the community, primarily with New Hampshire Humanities Council support and funding. The Humanities Council has a large number of book discussion series which groups such as libraries can apply to for funding to help defray the cost of a discussion leader and other expenses and there are generally copies of the books in these series available for loan from the State Library. Having a "trained" dis-

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**Center for the Book  
at the  
New Hampshire  
State Library**

Mary A. Russell, Director  
603-271-2866  
mrussell@library.state.nh.us

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## **New Hampshire Books**

By Donna Gilbreth



Authors Howard Mansfield and Sy Montgomery of Hancock are a married couple who write very dissimilar books from their shared home. Mansfield's works concentrate on New England's history and its changing culture. Montgomery, a naturalist, travels the world studying and writing about exotic animals and habitats. They have recently published vastly different books written during the same general time period about their small corner of New Hampshire. In 2004 Mansfield's *The Bones of the Earth* was published and it was followed in 2006 by Montgomery's *The Good Good Pig*. They are both enjoyable reading.

*The Good Good Pig* is the humorous and sometimes poignant story of the family's pet pig Christopher Hogwood. He was given to them as a severely undernourished runt on the verge of death. Yet he survived and as he grew ever larger over the next fourteen years he became a pampered member of the family and a local celebrity. Christopher was an expert at escaping the confines of the old barn, named Pig Palace. Montgomery speculated that "...perhaps, we mused, Christopher broke out for the same reason as do many young males. Maybe he was looking for beer." Christopher loved beer, and he loved Pig Spa, when his doting human admirers would groom him for hours. Christopher's animal companions included eight black hens called "the Ladies" and an obsessive/compulsive border collie named Tess. Montgomery's descriptions of feeding Christopher, who weighed several hundred pounds as an adult, are vivid and quite funny: "Christopher surged out of his pen, bucking and snorting. Any chickens in the way burst like grouse from cover and flew off in all directions. I ran ahead like a madwoman, struggling with the main slops bucket..." Food is definitely a central theme in this story. The book is also about how Christopher's popularity helped Montgomery overcome shyness and make many human friends. Interwoven with the story of Christopher's life and death is also the story of Montgomery's rocky relationship with her parents and their eventual deaths. This is a book for young and old alike.

Mansfield's book *The Bones of the Earth* also discusses the environs of Hancock. But the result is very different. This is a collection of essays exploring changes, not necessarily for the better, to this small corner of the world. Essays on the Boston Post Cane (given to a town's oldest resident) and the evolving trends in decorating gravesites illustrate our changing approach to death. We are distancing ourselves from the reality of death. Modern cemeteries will not allow mourners to decorate and personalize the graves of their loved ones. Perhaps that is why roadside shrines at the site of fatal accidents have become more prevalent. Mansfield states "You have kept the dead nearby, just as we used to, and as some cultures still do." Other essays explore physical changes that reflect societal changes, such as the beautiful old stone arch bridges once built with skill and care in New England and the small city once covered by a vast ancient lake. Another essay discusses Peterborough's evolution from a working class mill town to a wealthier version of a quaint New England village. These are all thought-provoking essays on our past and our current societal direction.

## Revisiting Celia Thaxter

By Alice Nye

Ten miles or so over the water east from Portsmouth Harbor are the Isles of Shoals, the group of nine small islands that entered the national literary consciousness through Celia Thaxter's verse and prose.

When a child of five, Thaxter was brought to those stark islands from Portsmouth, where she was born in 1835. She grew up there and is buried in the family graveyard on Appledore. She also spent much of her adulthood on Appledore, where she helped operate her family's resort hotel while presiding over an artistic and literary salon in the summer months that included some of the best-known writers, composers and artists of the day, including authors James Russell Lowell, John Greenleaf Whittier, Harriet Beecher Stowe and Sarah Orne Jewett; artists Childe Hassam, William Morris Hunt and John Appleton Brown; and musicians William Mason and Julius Eichberg.

Celia Thaxter was one of the most popular New England poets of the late nineteenth century, a highly respected writer of prose for adults and children, a talented painter and passionate gardener. It is also fair to say that her image as the enchanting "Island Queen" presiding gracefully and effortlessly over a salon of artistic gentry has persisted for over 100 years, often overshadowing her personal struggles and literary and artistic accomplishments.

J. Dennis Robinson, who has dedicated a superb website to Celia Thaxter on *SeacoastNH.com*, is more than a little annoyed with what he refers to as Thaxter's "island image." He explains in his online col-

umn, *As I Please*: "As much as any rock star, Celia and her publishers crafted that island image. In the most popular photographs we see her alone, often at her writing desk, or posing in her famous Appledore Island garden for American Impressionist Childe Hassam. In one popular painting, she stands, not puttering on her knees in horse manure among the flowers, but erect and independent in a white gown like—well, like a lighthouse. It is Celia's mythic equivalent of George Washington Crossing the Delaware."

Robinson admits that while he, too, loves the "charming stereotype" of the "Island Celia," he wants the record set straight: "Call me a heretic, but I think we should stop wor-

shiping the island gardener and get to know the landed Celia—for her good as well as our own. . . . I prefer the idea of a snow-drenched Celia Thaxter huffing up to her winter apartment at 44 State Street, on the edge of Portsmouth's red light district near the turn of the century."

major prose works (*Among the Isles of Shoals*, *An Island Garden*, and *A Memorable Murder*) as well as samples of her poetry, letters to friends and family, and children's stories. Here you can decide for yourself whether Thaxter's writings have withstood the test of time or whether they are dated and overdone as some literary critics suggest. Unsurprisingly, Older disagrees, suggesting that Thaxter's poetry "demonstrate(s) a remarkable craft with a variety of forms and subject matter from ballads about shipwrecks and verses in dialogue to love sonnets and odes." To Older, Celia Thaxter was "an extraordinary woman writer ahead of her time who . . . contributed an enduring legacy of writings to future generations."

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### **"It is Celia's mythic equivalent of George Washington Crossing the Delaware."**

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shipping the island gardener and get to know the landed Celia—for her good as well as our own. . . . I prefer the idea of a snow-drenched Celia Thaxter huffing up to her winter apartment at 44 State Street, on the edge of Portsmouth's red light district near the turn of the century."

Thankfully, there are a number of important works that one can turn to for a more complete picture of this gifted and complicated woman. New Hampshire author Julia Older of Hancock imagines a more fully dimensional Thaxter in her 1994 fictional biography, *The Island Queen*. In 1999 Older also edited a selection of Thaxter's writing (*Celia Thaxter: Selected Writings*) that serves as an excellent introduction to Celia Thaxter's literary versatility. She includes excerpts from her ma-

Nineteenth century literary scholar Jane Vallier also addresses the literary appeal of Thaxter's verse and prose. Vallier is the author of the 1982 groundbreaking literary biography *Poet on Demand*, the first scholarly examination of Thaxter's works. Vallier attributes to Thaxter a "unique literary voice [that] arose first in poetry, then in prose," with her prose "the solidification of her poetic voice."

Here, as a sample, is an excerpt from Thaxter's final prose work, *An Island Garden*, where she describes her garden poppies with an artist's eye and poet's voice: "It is held upright upon a straight and polished stem, its petals curving upward and

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# Children's Poetry in the Libraries Day

by Kyle Potvin

*Splash Communications*

During National Poetry Month in April 2007, New Hampshire children will enjoy a special literary celebration all their own: Children's Poetry in the Libraries Day. On Saturday, April 14, 2007, poets throughout the state will join with participating libraries to host programs devoted to reading and writing children's poetry. The inaugural program is targeted at second through fifth graders. The program was designed by Patricia Fagnoli, the New Hampshire state poet laureate.

"Reading and writing poems helps develop children's imagination, their sense of rhythm and creativity, and teaches them the pure joy to be found in language," says Ms. Fagnoli, a retired psychotherapist and social worker and award-winning poet. "I wanted not only to provide a program during Poetry Month that many children would enjoy, but also to encourage parents and other adults to bring more poetry into children's lives."

More than forty libraries from the Massachusetts border to the North Country are participating in this in-

augural event. Visiting poets include Marie Harris, former New Hampshire poet laureate; Pat Frisella, president of the New Hampshire Poetry Society; Mimi White, the Portsmouth poet laureate, and many more. Hundreds of children are expected to participate in the program which will give them the opportunity to hear local poets read children's favorites from a variety of contemporary and classic poets and to craft their own verses. Each event will be unique, designed by the volunteer poet and library.

U.S. Poet Laureate Donald Hall says: "The program has my wholesale support as U.S. Poet Laureate. I am particularly pleased to have my own state accomplishing this project."

Ms. Fagnoli initiated the program after being named New Hampshire's poet laureate in January 2006. She is the author of three books and two chapbooks of poetry. Her latest book, *Duties of the Spirit* (Tupelo Press, 2005), is the winner of the prestigious Jane Kenyon Poetry Book Award and her first book, *Necessary Light* (Utah State University Press, 1999), won the May Swenson Book Award.

## Participating Libraries

Baker Free Library, Bow - Barrington Public Library - Brookline Public Library - Brown Memorial Library, Bradford - Canaan Town Library - Conway Public Library - Dover Public Library - Dunbarton Public Library - Durham Public Library - Gilford Public Library - Goodwin Library, Farmington - Hampstead Public Library - Hancock Town Library - Hopkinton Town Library - Howe Library, Hanover - Jaffrey Public Library - Josiah Carpenter Library, Pittsfield - Keene Public Library - Laconia Public Library - Leach Library, Londonderry - Lebanon Public Library - Lincoln Public Library - Madbury Library - Miner Memorial Library, Lempster - Nashua Public Library - Nesmith Library, Windham - Tracy Memorial Library, New London - Newbury Public Library - Pelham Public Library - Peterborough Town Library - Philbrook James Library, Deerfield - Philip Read Memorial Library, Plainfield - Pillsbury Free Library, Warner - Portsmouth Public Library - Rye Public Library - Stephenson Memorial Library, Greenfield - Tucker Free Library, Henniker - Walpole Town Library - Weare Public Library - West Manchester Community Library - Wiggin Memorial Library, Stratham

## Celia Thaxter

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outward into the cup of light, pure gold with a lustrous satin sheen. A rich orange is painted on the gold, drawn in infinitely fine lines to a point in the center of the edge of each petal so that the effect is that of a diamond of flame in a cup of gold. It is not enough that the powdery anthers are orange bordered with gold; they are whirled about the very heart of the flower like a revolving Catherine-wheel of fire."

My own interest in Celia Thaxter began in 1978 with an essay, "Celia Thaxter as Woman and Writer," which I wrote for the catalogue accompanying the UNH exhibit *A Stern and Lovely Scene: A Visual History of the Isles of Shoals*.

Celia Thaxter's staying power as a literary figure of note must necessarily remain an open question — to be determined by future readers and scholars. She certainly has edged herself into the 21<sup>st</sup> century thanks to the resurgence of interest demonstrated not only by the works of Julia Older and Jane Vallier, but even more recently with the 2001 release of Sharon Paiva Stephen's *One Woman's Work: the Visual Art of Celia Lighton Thaxter*; and, three years later, Norma H. Mandel's comprehensive biography *Beyond the Garden Gate* that includes previously unexamined letters and family papers.

Finally, I would be remiss not to mention an astonishing book of poems by Annie Boutelle published in 2005, *Becoming Bone: Poems on the Life of Celia Thaxter*. Boutelle conveys illuminating moments of Thaxter's life through the imagined inner voice of Celia herself. This is an unsentimentalized version of Celia — the woman beneath the "Island Queen" persona.

## Letters About Literature 2007

Letters About Literature (LAL) is a reading and writing promotion program of the Center for the Book in the Library of Congress, presented in partnership with Target Stores and the state Centers for the Book.

To enter, young readers are asked to write a personal letter to an author explaining how his or her work changed their view of the world or themselves. Readers select authors from any genre—fiction or nonfiction, contemporary or classic, novels or poems or plays. The contest theme encourages young readers to explore their personal response to a book and then express that response in a creative, original way.

More than four hundred elementary, middle school, and high school students from New Hampshire sent letters for the 2007 LAL competition. Two groups of readers working on behalf of the Center for the Book in the Library of Congress read over 50,000 letters from students throughout the United States and selected semi-finalists for each participating state. There were thirty-five essays selected as New Hampshire's semi-finalists. The books that inspired the semi-finalist letters cover a wide range of topics and genres. The complete list of titles that inspired 2007 LAL entries is available on our web site.

In recognition of their accomplishment, each New Hampshire student who wrote a semi-finalist letter received a certificate and a bookmark depicting the 2007 inspirational titles at their competition level. There were three competition levels in New Hampshire this year: level I included students in grades 4-6, level II included 7th and 8th graders, and level III included students in grades 9-12. The semi-finalist essays at each

level were sent to a panel of New Hampshire judges who will select a state winner at each level. The essays of these state winners will be sent on to Washington, D.C., for the national competition.

The 2007 New Hampshire winners will be announced by early April on

the NH Center for the Book web site. Competition guidelines, materials for teachers, entry coupons and other details of the 2008 Letters About Literature competition will be available on our web site in the fall. Meanwhile, read, be inspired, and get ready to write back!

## Congratulations to the 2007 New Hampshire Semi-Finalists

Austin Albro  
Rachel Arnold  
Jonathan Bower  
Colleen Brady  
Olivia Brigham  
Jamie Burns  
Kelly Choate  
Laura Coughlin  
Tyler Cutler  
Malcolm DeMaggio  
Katie Dobbins  
Kiley Donohue  
Lauren Egbert  
Elizabeth Faiella  
Sarah Feinstein  
Tim Garrett  
Brenna Gilbert  
Jonathan Gual  
Katherine Harris  
Dagny Hedberg  
Brittany Helstrom  
Lizzy Kowalik  
Livie Lane  
Brita Larson  
Dylan Mahalingam  
Marissa McCoo  
Katelyn McNamara  
Stephanie Riddel  
Kelsey Seaver  
Thomas J. Selinka  
Abby Shepherd  
Danielle Walczak  
Emily Ufnal  
Gwyneth Welch  
Cecille Yang

Warren  
Milford  
Hollis  
Gilford  
Madbury  
Chesterfield  
Keene  
Concord  
Hollis  
Pembroke  
Gilford  
Derry  
Gilford  
Northwood  
Londonderry  
Pembroke  
North Haverhill  
Hollis  
Derry  
Lyndeborough  
Pembroke  
Brookline  
Dover  
Londonderry  
Derry  
Pembroke  
Londonderry  
Milford  
Newport  
Londonderry  
Keene  
Lee  
Milford  
Hancock  
Hollis



# Exploring Speculative Fiction

By Susan Farber, Program Officer  
NH Humanities Council

The New Hampshire Humanities Council is exploring science fiction, fantasy, magical realism and alternate history – the genre of speculative fiction – in its 2007 project, *Speculate: a new past, a different present, an out-of-this-world future*. The state-wide schedule includes book discussions, author visits, and other free public programs.

*Speculate*'s headliner for April is young-adult fantasy author Tamora Pierce. On Sunday, April 15, at 2:00, she'll be talking about "The Reality of Fantasy" at the Concord City Auditorium. A book signing will follow. This event is free of charge and open to the public; no reservation required. Some libraries and school groups are already making plans to carpool to the event and the Humanities Council will reserve blocks of seats for groups. Contact Anne Coughlin at [acoughlin@nhhc.org](mailto:acoughlin@nhhc.org) or 224-4071 x 12, for group reservations.

The year-long schedule of public programs launched with three appearances in January by NH sci-fi author James Patrick Kelly at the public libraries in Nashua, Plymouth, and Rochester, and continued with a public address about the intersections of

faith and science by Brother Guy Consolmagno, S.J., the Vatican's astronomer, on March 2 at the Christa McAuliffe Planetarium in Concord. For announcements of upcoming *Speculate* events visit the Humanities Council's website at [www.nhhc.org](http://www.nhhc.org).

Forming the core of *Speculate* is an 11-work booklist representing classic sci-fi and contemporary cyberpunk, fantasy and hard science, and even an audio-drama that travels to the mystical corners of Morocco. The Humanities Council purchased sets of these titles which are now circulating around the state thanks to the program's invaluable partnership with the NH State Library's Book Bag. So far 44 discussions have been scheduled at 15 different libraries and other public sites. The Council also recruited and trained more than 30 facilitators, many younger scholars new to the book discussion circuit, to lead these community discussions. Libraries wishing to schedule a *Speculate* book discussion should contact Susan Farber at 224-4071 x 16 or [sfarber@nhhc.org](mailto:sfarber@nhhc.org).

One of *Speculate*'s goals is to attract a non-traditional audience to book programs. While women account for 80% of fiction readers, sci-

ence fiction is equally split between the genders. In addition, the list includes books such as *The Golden Compass* suited for teen and mixed-generation groups. As the year progresses, attendance reports will show us whether *Speculate* helped bring new people – especially men and young adults – to libraries' discussion circles.

Another important goal is to ask the Big Questions that speculative fiction raises, and in the unreal setting of space, the future, and fantastic lands, to understand our own world, culture and time in sharp perspective. For example, *Beggars in Spain*, a futuristic novel by Nancy Kress, grapples with the social consequences of genetic engineering and also raises the age-old conflict between the haves and the have-nots. The rich variety of topics offered in these book discussions and public programs will, we hope, bring together preteen girls and their mothers, hard scientists and Creationists, state officials and Libertarians, New Age mystics and Roman Catholics, old-school fans of H.G. Wells and cyberpunks. We are very excited about these opportunities to bring unlike-minded people together to talk about their values, their fears, and their connection to stories.

## Which book would you save from the flames?

In his classic novel *Fahrenheit 451*, author Ray Bradbury created a futuristic society that burned books. The main character, Guy Montag, finds a group of men who have formed a loosely organized rebellion to save books. Their plan is to "keep the knowledge we think we will need." The rebels save books that represented "bits and pieces of history and literature and international law. Each man had a book he wanted to remember, and did." If you lived in a society that burned books, what is an important book that you would want to save from the fire? We invite your responses as part of **New Hampshire Reads Fahrenheit 451**, a collaboration of the Center for the Book at the New Hampshire State Library and the New Hampshire Humanities Council. Tell us which book you would remember, which book you would save from the flames, and why. Send your response (in 100 words or less) to the NH Center for the Book, 20 Park St., Concord NH 03301, or submit online at <http://bigreadnh.blogspot.com>. Please include your name, phone number, and city or town with your submission. Your contact information is for verification purposes and won't be shared with other organizations. Responses will be posted on the project web page, and some will be published in a booklet that will be released at the New Hampshire Reads Fahrenheit 451 kick-off event in October. The deadline for responses to be included in the printed booklet is **June 30**.

# A Bookseller's Education

*By Willard Williams, Co-owner,  
The Toadstool Bookshops*

I've got a high school diploma circa 1970 and one somewhat botched semester at college. And that's it - no more formal education, no degree in English Lit, no MBA, no professional skills training.

So what am I doing here in Portland, Oregon sitting down with 24 really brilliant professional booksellers to advise the American Booksellers Association's (ABA) executive board? All I can offer is something

The answer is the wonder of this business.

I doubt there's another industry where this happens - where people who should be honing their professional skills in secrecy to wipe out the competition are sharing their knowledge and abilities, encouraging new booksellers, combining their resources, and working together to strengthen the entire bookselling community. There are traditionally two types of businesses: for profit and not for profit, but booksellers seem to recognize a third - "not just for profit".

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now approaching 35 years running a bookstore in rural New Hampshire - make that now 3 stores - but rule out the first 8 or 10 years when the bookstore didn't really sell enough to pay much and I spent 3 of my 6 working days each week doing carpentry. Can I really offer some useful advice? Maybe I can, but if so it's because of only one reason- one very crazy reason.

After our two days advising the ABA board, 500 independent booksellers from all over the country are going to arrive here for the Winter Institute - two days of seminars with the goal of creating profitable bookstores. But this is crazy, we are all competitors, and given today's circumstances, this should be a cutthroat business, each of us trying to get our share of the diminishing book market. This is booksellers teaching booksellers, sharing expertises. Why on earth would anyone teach their competitors how to do a better job selling books? and teach for free?!

And I know myself and my family-owned bookstores, The Toadstool Bookshops, have been the beneficiaries of this attitude since 1972 when we began with one tiny bookstore in Peterborough. I was 19, just turning 20, my siblings not much older. We knew absolutely nothing about business, let alone the business of bookselling. How do you know what books to stock? How do you best get them into your store? And how are you going to track and control your inventory? How do you write good ads and how much should you spend on advertising? How do you hire good sales people and how much can you pay them? How much rent can you afford? A budget, what's that? What's the best way to categorize and display your books? So much to be learned, where can you get answers? If you're a bookseller, from your competitors of course!

The ABA has a bookselling school and a very practical 400 page manual written by booksellers. The New En-

gland Booksellers Association's annual convention includes two days of extraordinarily useful seminars taught by experienced booksellers. And once or twice a year they also offer intensive seminars on special topics such as advertising or staffing or finances. Publisher's sales representatives shared tips from other stores. Friendly, frank, and open conversations with other booksellers and visits to their stores helped us tremendously. And we learned from those who bought books. They told us about good books and great authors to stock and recommend. And most importantly, because they were patient, we learned what they expected from us. We learned, and as we learned our store grew better and stronger.

So yes, maybe I really can leave the ABA board with some useful advice, but only because so many others in this crazy business have been so willing to share their knowledge with us over all these years. And their sharing has shaped my passion for bookselling—a passion I only hope I can encourage in others. It's a passion and with it a professionalism you will find in independent bookstores all over the country.

## **Toadstool Bookshops**

<http://www.toadbooks.com>

The Colony Mill Marketplace  
Keene, NH  
603-352-8815

Lorden Plaza  
Milford, NH  
603-673-1734

12 Depot Square  
Peterborough, NH  
603-924-3543

# Putting Together Concord Reads

## A Librarian's Perspective

By Robbin Bailey  
Librarian,  
Concord Public Library

Why should a library host a “One Book, One Community” program like Concord Reads? The purpose of Concord Reads is to explore a book in depth, and to bring the community together to discuss it. Everyone reading the same book gives people a chance to make connections and find new insights. We explore different aspects of the book and have done programs on mill towns, humor, religious themes, and other interesting topics in each book.

Choosing the book – it’s very difficult to find the right book. Our title criteria include:

- Theme: Appeals to a wide audience? Contains issues the community can relate to? Contains issues that would spark interesting discussions?
- Recognition: Critical Reviews? Awards?
- Author: Living? Availability? Other speaker(s) available?
- Format: Available in paper-back? Available in spoken word CD? Available movie in DVD?
- Reading level: Accessible to a wide audience?
- Length of the book

The Concord Reads Committee starts in the beginning of the year to discuss possible Concord Reads titles. We take two to three months to do this, and try to have several

people read each potential book so that there is more than one opinion on each book. These are the titles we have chosen in the past:

2002  
*The Bridge of San Luis Rey*  
by Thornton Wilder

2003  
*Empire Falls*  
by Richard Russo

2004  
The works of poet  
and author Donald Hall

2005  
*Water Witches*  
by Chris Bohjalian

2006  
*When the Emperor Was Divine*  
by Julie Otsuka

It’s a good idea to work with community partners on your “one book” program such as your library’s Friends or Foundation, local bookstores, the local paper, and supporters of the arts such as the New Hampshire Humanities Council. We are very grateful for the funding and in-kind support we have received from our Concord Reads supporters.

When setting up the programs, try to do it as far in advance as possible, and make sure you take into account holidays and conflicts with other popular programs in town.

Always schedule at least one book discussion and then other events that tie in with the chosen book. Different types of events will bring more people and different ideas to your programs. Here are a few examples from our programs:

- For *The Bridge of San Luis Rey* we had Brother Andrew Thornton from St. Anselm talk about the theological aspects of the book.
- Rebecca Rule led a discussion about humor in *Empire Falls*.
- We had a gala celebration with Donald Hall on his birthday to celebrate his work (500 people attended).
- We held a dowsing program at a local park when we read *Water Witches*.
- Another memorable event, related to *When the Emperor Was Divine*, was Carl Watanabe’s program “Starting Life Behind Barbed Wire: Growing Up in an Internment Camp” about his time as a young boy in an internment camp for Japanese Americans.

Community book discussions like Concord Reads are a wonderful way of bringing people together, bringing them to your library to discuss great literature and celebrating the written word.

*Book Notes (ISSN 1554-3609) is published twice per year by the Center for the Book at the New Hampshire State Library, 20 Park Street, Concord, NH 03301-6314.  
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<http://www.nh.gov/nhsl/bookcenter>

# Zorro is Hero of Nashua's One City, One Book Program

By Carol Luers Eyman  
Outreach and Community  
Services Coordinator,  
Nashua Public Library

*Zorro* by Isabel Allende was selected as the 2007 featured title for the Nashua Reads: One City, One Book program.

"All fans of adventure and legend, of heroes and history, en garde!" said the *Miami Herald* about the book. "In a match made in heaven, Isabel Allende takes on the legend of Zorro and presents the swashbuckling saga of his formative years as only a storyteller of her caliber could."

This is the fifth year of Nashua's One City, One Book project. The goal of the program is to get as many Nashuans as possible to read the same book, talk about it with friends, coworkers, and neighbors, and then attend programs related to its themes. Previous selections have included *In*

*the Heart of the Sea*, *The Kite Runner*, *Travels With Charley*, and *Empire Falls*.

Among the programs offered this year were book discussions, a lecture on Spanish history, a demonstration by students from Amoskeag Fencing Center, a screening of a silent film version of Zorro with live piano accompaniment, and an online blog on the Nashua Public Library web site ([blogs.nashualibrary.org/readers](http://blogs.nashualibrary.org/readers)) where readers could discuss the book. Library staff post to the blog with the hope that readers will visit it and add their own comments.

*Zorro* was chosen for the One City, One Book program by a committee organized by the Nashua Public Library and including representatives from local colleges, newspapers, bookstores, and other community groups.

The committee looks for titles that are complex enough to stimulate

thoughtful discussions but accessible enough to attract wide participation. They prefer titles that lend themselves to related programming, such as films, lectures, and concerts. Another requirement is that the title be available in paperback, large print, and audio editions.

The library used trust funds to purchase 50 copies of the book for cardholders to borrow, in addition to large-print, audio, and Spanish copies. As of February 28, the title had circulated 192 times during the current fiscal year, with more circulation expected during the height of the program in the spring. The book was also well-stocked by local bookstores, including Borders, Annie's Bookstop, and Barnes & Noble.

The One City, One Book project is modeled after Seattle Reads, originally known as If All of Seattle Read the Same Book, a project developed by the Washington Center for the Book in 1998.

## Fifth Annual Hopkinton READS! A Success

By Elizabeth Levy, Director,  
Hopkinton Town Library

During Hopkinton READS! 2006, copies of Jodi Picoult's *My Sister's Keeper* circulated over 100 times; 120 copies of the book were sold, and several hundred people attended the programs. Several months later copies of the book and audiobook are still on reserve and circulating heavily.

Community members read New Hampshire author Jodi Picoult's *My Sister's Keeper* while exploring "How Families Cope with Trauma" with Shirley Kirby, Ph.D., and Vicki Compitello, Ph.D., both counselors

at Cornerstone Family Resources. Hopkinton residents Karl Lanocha, MD, Mitchell Simon, JD, and Jean Tower, RN, helped attendees look at the book's ethical issues through the lenses of medicine and law in "Are We Our Sisters' Keeper?" "Uncle George" Radcliffe told "Stories of the Stars" for children who made cards of the constellations under Audrey Gardner's tutelage. Hopkinton High School English teacher Kate LaClair led two discussions of the book challenging her audiences to hear the characters' voices.

A highlight of this year's program was an evening with Jodi Picoult attended by an overflow crowd of 152 people. Jodi, along with Jennifer Sternick,

Jodi's friend and legal counsel, volunteered an evening from their busy schedules offering an insightful and humorous look into the way they fine tune Jodi's ideas into such compelling novels. Picoult read an excerpt from her new book, *19 Minutes*, which was released March 6, signed a lot of autographs, and answered many questions to the delight of those present. Joanna Henderson arranged and coordinated this special evening.

Contributions from YBP Library Services, Teddy's Tees, Kathy Barnes, and The Hopkinton Public Library Foundation made this program possible and committee members Elissa Barr, Susan Burns, Audrey Gardner, Tom Meehan, and Pat Gruttemeyer made the program such a success.

## Book Discussions

continued from p. 1

cussion facilitator is a huge benefit—we are much more likely to stay on topic and I love to hear the insights of such Humanities Council discussion leaders as Ingrid Graff, Suzanne Brown, and a host of others. We all seem to come away from a Humanities Council-funded discussion with a new sense of the book discussed. Our community is very supportive of our discussion series and we often draw people from as far away as Randolph, Colebrook, and Conway.

Many libraries “go it alone” and create their own book discussion groups or “enable” ones in private homes by helping them get copies of the books. Generally, the groups seem to run democratically and people take turns deciding on a book to read and then leading the discussion while sometimes the librarian takes the initiative. Some groups, such as the one facilitated by Sherry Evans when she was at the Rye Public Library, come up with a long list of books once a year which are voted on by the group and then the librarians come up with a list of 12 for the year based on the votes.

Groups tend to meet once a month which gives people time to read the books. Most libraries that host book groups have only one which tends to be for adults (mostly women) who read a variety of books, often fiction, while some are like the Tracy Memorial Library in New London which runs three separate groups, a “library book group, a mystery book group and a Council on Aging group.” Here at the NH Community Technical College-Berlin Fortier Library, we started one six years ago that meets once a month at noon, primarily for our faculty, staff, and occasionally students and others.

We, like many library discussion groups, depend heavily on the kindness of librarians across the state who lend us copies of the books.

When I asked people in our “day” group here at N.H.C.T.C.-Berlin about their favorites, many mentioned the three times we have had conference calls with authors—with Chris Bohjalian on his book *Before You Know Kindness*, Ron McLarty on *Memory of Running*, and Cornelia Read on *A Field of Darkness*. Many authors are open to this these days and it’s easy to contact them, either through their web site or their publisher’s.

Like many other librarians, we have found in our “day” discussions that it’s best to choose a book under 300 pages so people aren’t overwhelmed, that isn’t too recently published or hugely in demand (as that would make it tough to borrow from other libraries), that we can also get in audio format, in both cd and cassette formats, for our commuters.

Last year, the New Hampshire Center for the Book surveyed librarians around the state, asking “What book

did your group read that generated the best discussion?” (See the list below.) Classics were mentioned several times as good choices and it seems that often books that are universally loved do not generate much discussion while books that not everyone agrees on often do lead to lively discussions.

There seems to be a wide range of methods used in the state to promote book groups. Some, like the Seabrook Library, print up flyers which are distributed, and advertise upcoming discussions in the local newspapers and on their web site while others also list them in their library newsletters, do direct mailings and put posters up in the area, or just rely on word of mouth.

Is it worth all the time and effort to do book discussions? While responding to the question “What do you dislike about having book discussion groups in your library,” Katherine Hillier of the Pease Public Library in Plymouth summed it up by writing, “Well, there is the small matter of the work involved, but it is such a rewarding experience and that is good compensation!”

### “Good discussion books”

*Angle of Repose* by Wallace Stegner  
*Beloved* by Toni Morrison  
*Borderliners* by Peter Hoeg  
*Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* by Mark Haddon  
*Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini  
*Life of Pi* by Yann Martel  
*Mountains Beyond Mountains* by Tracy Kidder  
*My Sister’s Keeper* by Jodi Picoult  
*Peyton Place* by Grace Metalious  
*Poisonwood Bible* by Barbara Kingsolver  
*The Red Tent* by Anita Diamant  
*The Secret History* by Donna Tartt  
*The Secret Life of Bees* by Sue Monk Kidd  
*Their Eyes Were Watching God* by Zora Neale Hurston  
*Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe  
*Yellow Raft on Blue Water* by Michael Dorris

# Book Discussion Groups: A Selected Bibliography

Compiled & Annotated  
by Mary Russell

**Burt, Daniel S.** *The Novel 100: A Ranking of the Greatest Novels of All Time.* (New York: Facts On File, 2004)

This listing is based on one, admittedly subjective, reader's opinion of novels and provides very helpful – and brief – analyses of many classic novels in essay form. For each book the author explains how it fits into the tradition of the novel as well as the times in which it was written, the themes and issues raised by the book, and a bit about the author. This book would be very helpful in preparing to lead a discussion on one of these books. Most of the included books are those generally considered to be classics and range from the 11<sup>th</sup> century's *Tale of Genji* to *Beloved* by Toni Morrison (1987).

**Ellington, Elisabeth and Jane Freimiller.** *A Year of Reading: A Month-by-Month Guide to Classics and Crowd-pleasers for You and Your Book Group.* (Naperville, Illinois: Sourcebooks, Inc., 2002)

This guide, co-written by New Hampshire resident Elisabeth Ellington, provides a month-by-month plan for selecting books for your reading group or yourself. For each month of the year five different titles are suggested and for each title discussion questions, brief notes on the author, and suggestions for further reading are included. Frequently asked questions and twenty-five ways to build a better book group are also included.

**Gardner, Sarah.** *Read It and Eat: A Month-by-month Guide to Scintillating Book Club Selections and Mouthwatering Menus.* (New York: Hudson Street Press, 2005)

Four titles, along with discussion questions and related menus with recipes, are included for each month of the year plus four bonus months' worth of additional titles and recipes. This book does not offer guidance on organizing or running a book discussion group but it does have several interesting book suggestions and some fabulous sounding food to go with them. The monthly themes are a fun approach to organizing the reading and the blurbs on each book are just enough info to tell you if a book is for you or not without spoiling the story.

**Jacobsohn, Rachel W.** *The Reading Group Handbook: Everything You Need to Know to Start Your own Book Club.* (New York: Hyperion, 1998)

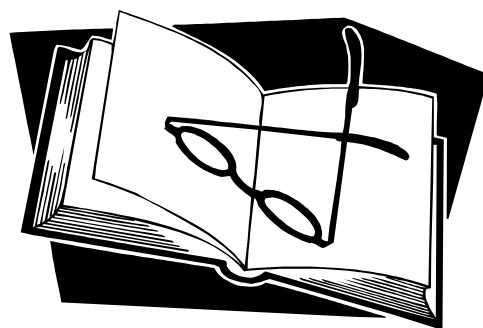
Many helpful ideas are included on how to lead a book discussion group, including setting rules, generating discussion, and selecting suitable books. Book lists are included, including annotated listings of books the author has used when leading groups and a very good section on short story collections. Additional book lists are included but with no details beyond title and author. There is a useful list of resources for background research on books and a glossary of literary terms.

**Laskin, David and Holly Hughes.** *The Reading Group Book: The Complete Guide to Starting and Sustaining a Reading Group with Annotated Lists of 250 Titles for Provocative Discussion.* (New York: Plume/Penguin, 1995)

This book contains lots of helpful nuts & bolts type information, including lots of examples from book groups around the country and a troubleshooting section. Sources for selecting books and general questions to generate discussion on any book are included. Some of the authors' comments about books that do or don't lend themselves to the modern era make this book seem a little dated but the information is very useful.

**Major, David C. and John S. Major.** *100 One-night Reads: A Book Lover's Guide.* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2001)

This collection of brief essays on 100 different books, fiction and non-fiction, that the authors believe can be read in a single evening (I have my doubts about that) is an excellent resource for groups looking for a good, short book. The essays tell you enough to know if the book interests you, but not so much that the story is spoiled for the reader. A listing of books by category (history, memoir, fiction, etc.) and suggestions for related readings within the essays are included. The books do tend toward classics, and may not appeal to groups with more contemporary taste.



**Moore, Ellen and Kira Stevens.** *Good Books Lately: The One-stop Resource for Book Groups and Other Greedy Readers.* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2004)

This is a great source of questions for various types of books – including questions to ask about the book that everyone in the group hated. There is an extensive list of resources for book group information, a glossary of literary terms, and a troubleshooting section included. The tone of this book is very chatty and the author's consulting business and web site are mentioned often enough to be irritating, but overall the book contains a lot of useful information.

**Pearl, Nancy.** *Book Lust: Recommended Reading for Every Mood, Moment, and Reason.* (Seattle: Sasquatch Books, 2003)

**Pearl, Nancy.** *More Book Lust: Recommended Reading for Every Mood, Moment, and Reason.* (Seattle: Sasquatch Books, 2005)

Not written specifically for book groups, these two volumes are nevertheless a treasure trove of great books your group might want to read. The included titles are given brief annotations, sometimes very brief, and are organized into themed lists.

**Pearlman, Mickey.** *What to Read: The Essential Guide for Reading Group Members and Other Book Lovers: Revised & Updated.* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1994, 1999)

A collection of book lists – arranged by themes like 'My Family, Myself,' 'Mi Vida Latina,' and 'Be a Sport' – including a brief synopsis, a publication date, and a page count for each book is included. The introduction provides some suggestions for forming your own group and profiles

continues on page 14

## The Poetry Place

# Encouraging the Love of Poetry

*by Patricia Fargnoli, New Hampshire Poet Laureate*

First, let me say thank you to the Center for the Book for giving me this platform to talk about poetry. Far too many times, as I've traveled around the state, I've heard people say "Oh, I never read poetry." Problem is, I think, that too often we've been turned off to poetry by early experiences struggling with difficult poems. Or by the perception that poetry is necessarily too difficult and has nothing of great value for our lives.

But nothing could be less true! Poetry is at the very center of my own life and has been for over thirty years. It has given me both solace and joy. It's given me words for things I knew but had no words for. And it's told me things I didn't know and that expanded my sense of reality and my world. For those reasons, when I was appointed NH Poet Laureate in December 2005, I knew that I wanted, first of all, to bring more poetry into people's lives. And I decided to begin this in two ways:

First, I wanted to bring public attention to those many serious poets, the famous, the less famous, and the unknown, who work hard at writing poems every day, for whom poetry has become a guiding force in their lives. And I wanted to introduce people to them and to their wonderful poems.

And secondly, because I so strongly believe that the roots of a love of poetry begin in childhood, and that such a love enhances a child's imagination, sense of rhythm and enjoyment in language, I wanted to do something to promote the importance of poetry in children's lives.

As for the first goal: New Hampshire has a long tradition of poets—Robert Frost, of course, but also the current United States Poet Laureate, Donald Hall, and past Consultant in Poetry Maxine Kumin, Pulitzer Prize winner Charles Simic, and the list goes on from there. In fact, there are dozens and dozens of serious working poets in the state today. In order to give them greater exposure in the state, I've collaborated with the New Hampshire Arts Council to have a link added to the poet laureate web site for a New Hampshire Poet Showcase.

Every two weeks a different New Hampshire poet is featured, with their photo, a short biography, a poem the poet has chosen to appear and a paragraph about how that poem came to be written. Poets from past weeks are archived so you can catch up with those you've missed. I hope you will check out these fine poems and learn about the poets. To get there go to the New Hampshire Arts Council website (<http://www.nh.gov/nharts/>) and follow the two links to the Poet Showcase.

As for my second goal I'm excited that April 14th will be our first "Children's Poetry in the Libraries Day." On that day 40 New Hampshire poets have volunteered to go into almost 40 libraries across the state to put on a program of reading and writing poetry for children (see page 4 for details). The programs are the culmination of a year's planning and we are hoping that hundreds of children will be involved in these events and that the publicity will raise public consciousness about the value of poetry for children.

My hope is that these two programs will encourage the love of poetry in more children and adults across New Hampshire.

*Patricia Fargnoli, New Hampshire Poet Laureate, has graciously agreed to write a regular column in Book Notes where she will share her thoughts and observations about poetry in our state.*

# The Children's Literacy Foundation

By Ann Hoey, Youth Services  
Coordinator, NH State Library

The Children's Literacy Foundation (CLiF) works to nurture a love of reading and writing among children throughout New Hampshire and Vermont. CLiF's programs target children in rural communities and children who are at high risk of growing up functionally illiterate. Founded in 1998, the non-profit organization believes strongly in the value of literacy for children and their families.

In one of its most successful programs, CLiF provides sponsorships for the purchase of books for children up to age 12 for public libraries in towns with populations under 5,000. Already, 87 public libraries in NH have received CLiF grants. The libraries must raise a certain amount of money, and then CLiF provides a match of double the amount of funds. Because of CLiF's purchase discount, each library receives at least \$1,400 worth of new children's books. CLiF accepts grant

applications from libraries twice a year—February 1st and August 1st.

Most recently, the following NH libraries were awarded CLiF grants: Canaan Public Library, Epsom Public Library, Dunbar Free Library in Grantham, Haverhill Public Library, Gordon-Nash Library in New Hampton, and the Winchester Public Library. CLiF will deliver books to each of these libraries and make a special presentation to the community's children.

CLiF reaches the children of New Hampshire and Vermont through other means as well. It sponsors homeless shelters, women's shelters, shelters for at-risk children, and low-income housing. It has brought its programs to the children of prison inmates, migrant children and refugee children. CLiF also sponsors writing workshops and visits by children's authors and illustrators.

To learn more about CLiF, visit [www.clifonline.org](http://www.clifonline.org).

## 2007 International IMPAC Dublin Literary Award

The titles of 138 novels nominated for the prestigious 2007 International IMPAC Dublin Literary Award have been announced and are at [www.impacdublinaward.ie/News.htm](http://www.impacdublinaward.ie/News.htm).

The New Hampshire State Library is one of 169 participating libraries from around the world that submitted nominations for this annual award, the world's richest literary prize for a single work of fiction, of high literary merit, published in English. Names of all of the nominating libraries and their choices are also posted online.

Those nominated by the New Hampshire State Library for 2007 are:

- *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* by Jonathan Safran Foer
- *Kafka on the Shore* by Haruki Murakami
- *Never Let Me Go* by Kazuo Ishiguro.

A short list of ten novels will be culled from the long list of nominated titles by an international panel of judges and announced on April 4<sup>th</sup>. Then, on June 14<sup>th</sup>, the 2007 winner will be announced.

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# Ladybug Picture Book Award

In November New Hampshire children from preschoolers to those in the third grade will be voting for the 2007 Ladybug Picture Book Award winner and they have a great collection of titles to choose from! Many of the nominated titles teach us something: what happens when you jump to conclusions, the value of considering situations from both sides, how sandwiches save lives, why rules sometimes need to be broken, the connection between crucifers and catastrophe, the dangers of internet shopping for shortcuts, how serendipity can lead to just the right gift, and the power of presents. Others are adventures like tracking a mysterious moose and a thrilling barnyard chase. The titles were selected by the Ladybug Picture Book Award Committee, chaired by Ann Hoey. Voting materials, including picture ballots and tally sheets, will be posted on the Ladybug web page in June. Ladybug stickers may be ordered year-round using the order form on the web site.

*I Ain't Gonna Paint No More!* by Karen Beaumont and illustrated by

David Catrow, published by Harcourt, Inc., was chosen as the winner of the 2006 Ladybug Picture Book Award. At over 120 schools and libraries 17,027 children cast ballots for their favorite picture book from among the 10 nominated titles and *I Ain't Gonna Paint No More!* won with 3,553 votes.

## 2007 Nominees

- *Red Fox at McCloskey's Farm* by Brian Heinz and Chris Seban
- *Duck & Goose* by Tad Hills
- *Library Lion* by Michelle Knudsen & Kevin Hawkes
- *Not Afraid of Dogs* by Susanna Pitzer & Larry Day
- *I Saw an Ant on the Railroad Track* by Joshua Prince & Macky Pamintuan
- *Pip & Squeak* by Ian Schoenherr
- *The Secret Science Project that Almost Ate the School* by Judy Sierra & Stephen Gammell
- *The Trouble with Cauliflower* by Jane Sutton & Jim Harris
- *The Remarkable Friendship of Mr. Cat and Mr. Rat* by Rick Walton & Lisa McCue
- *Moose Tracks!* by Karma Wilson & Jack E. Davis

## Bibliography

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of a few book groups around the US, and a very interesting section on 'How to Read.'

Saal, Rollene. *The New York Public Library Guide to Reading Groups*. (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1995)

In fewer than 100 pages this book tells you all you need to know to organize a book discussion group: what administration is needed (not much), what to consider in choosing books, and how to successfully guide a book discussion. An extensive annotated list of suggested books is also included.

Slezak, Ellen. *The Book Group Book: A Thoughtful Guide to Forming and Enjoying a Stimulating Book Discussion Group*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition. (Chi-

cago: Chicago Review Press, 2000)

This collection of essays by members of various book groups around the country is interesting to read and includes some insights that might be helpful to a group looking for a new way to do things, but this book is not the place to start for nuts and bolts info on how to start or run a bookgroup. The annotated book lists provided by some of the essayists provide a more detailed look at the various groups being profiled.

Weiler, Elizabeth and Karisa Greer. *Good Books, Good Friends, Good Food: A Successful Recipe for Your Own Book Club*. (Woods Cross, Utah: Good Books Good Friends, 2002)

Based on their own experience a group of women compiled this beautiful book which lists books and a recipe for each month of the year. A few discussion questions and author facts are included for each book. The books tend toward classics and the recipes toward desserts.

## Award Notes

*New Hampshire is home to several book awards and details about each of them, including links to their web sites, are included at [www.nh.gov/nhsl/bookcenter/literacy/awards.html](http://www.nh.gov/nhsl/bookcenter/literacy/awards.html)*

### Great Stone Face Award

The GSF Committee is currently reading the books on our consideration list. In April, we will choose the 25 finalists for 2007-2008. Voting for this year's titles will take place during the last week of April. The winner and the next year's list will be announced at the NH Libraries Conference on May 17th during the GSF Tea program.

### Isinglass Teen Read Award

The Isinglass Teen Read Award (7th & 8th grade reading list) has closed nominations for the 2007-2008 cycle; the final list for next year will be posted by May 20th under the Teen Zone at their web site where you will also find voting sheets. All votes for this year's winner must be received at [blibrary@metrocast.net](mailto:blibrary@metrocast.net) no later than May 7, 2007. An updated order form including bookmarks of the 2007-2008 list (100 for \$6) will also be available on the website in May.

### The Flume: NH Teen Readers' Choice Award

Sponsored by the New Hampshire Library Association, the Flume Award gives high school students the opportunity to choose their favorite title from among 13 fiction and non-fiction books. Last year, teens voted to give the first Flume Award to Dan Brown for *The Da Vinci Code*. Voting for this year's award will take place in public and school libraries in April. Ballots and other information can be found on the website.

# Granite State Readers Recommend

We invite readers from around the state to tell us about a book that they would recommend to others. Here is a selection of the recommendations that we received recently. Please check out the complete list of Granite State readers' recommendations and tell us about a book that you would recommend by visiting our web site at [www.nh.gov/nhsl/bookcenter/programs](http://www.nh.gov/nhsl/bookcenter/programs).

## Atkinson

### Katie McDonough

#### Director, Kimball Public Library

*Timothy; or, Notes of an Abject Reptile* by Verlyn Klinkenborg. This is a remarkable book, a book that meets my criteria of wanting to run up to people on the street and say you've GOT to read this book! This is a vignette of life in an 18th century English village as seen through the eyes of a tortoise. It is profound, poignant, and poetic.

## Concord

### Amber Cushing

#### Librarian, NH State Library

*Sweetness in the Belly* by Camilla Gibb. I couldn't put this book down. It's an excellent work truly displaying the hope, sadness and longing of Lilly, the main character. Lilly's hippie ex-pat British parents wander around Europe with her in tow until they are killed in Morocco when she is 8. She is then raised in an Islamic shrine by a Quran scholar. At age 16 she ends up in the Ethiopian city of Harar, where most of the story takes place, but later she is in London as a refugee. The story moves back and forth between 1980's London and 1970's Ethiopia, but still flows nicely and is not jumpy like some novels written in this form. There is much attention to detail of place, perhaps due to Gibb's PhD research in Ethiopia. Overall, it is the story of trying to find one's place in the world.



## Concord

### Alice Nye

*Half of a Yellow Sun* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. This book has it all: memorable characters, a gripping plot and writing that can stop you in your tracks. The backdrop is Nigeria during the Biafran secession and civil war, but the themes are sadly still with us: the ethnic, religious and class prejudices that foster man's inhumanities. This is a special writer and special book.

## Durham

### Michael Horton

The book *Journey Toward Justice* by Dennis Fritz is a memoir and John Grisham calls it "compelling and fascinating." Dennis Fritz is the real character in John Grisham's book *The Innocent Man*. *The Innocent Man* mostly is about his co-defendant Ronnie Williamson who was sentenced to death. Dennis Fritz, who was sentenced to life behind bars, and Ronnie Williamson were exonerated in 1999 after 12 desperate and tortuous years in prison. Ronnie Williamson passed away a few years later.

## Durham

### Zelda Moore

*Terrorist* by John Updike. I thought he did a splendid job and I was particularly engaged with the ending chapter. A masterful piece of writing — an illuminating examination of what it's like to be human and be living in today's world.

## Manchester

### Mary Russell

*The Lost Art of Keeping Secrets* by Eva Rice. I loved this book! It was funny, the characters were very memorable, and it was full of clever turns of phrase. *Publisher's Weekly* said (and I agree): "With élan and insight into human foibles . . . Rice, daughter of lyricist Tim Rice, ties the Wallace and Delancy families together with a surprising, bittersweet plot twist. Rice's remarkable gift for creating singular characters in this memorable story underscores her presence as a fresh new voice in fiction."

## Portsmouth

### Sherry Evans

#### Head of Public Services, Portsmouth Public Library

*Eat the Document* by Dana Spiotta. I love this book for its creative writing style, flow between the 70's and the 90's, and the way the story unfolds in flashbacks and time shifts. Surprising action occurs even on the last page. Two lovers who radically oppose the Vietnam War execute a bombing that goes terribly wrong. Each goes underground and must stay there or face arrest and a probable prison sentence. As the novel unfolds and the years go by, we learn historical facts about the protests and anarchism of the 70's and in the Seattle area of the late 90's. Compassion, fervor, integrity, survival, sadness and humor all abound in a steady pace. This book will leave you questioning your own values and beliefs. Also, *The Echo Maker* by Richard Powers. About a young man who sustains a serious head injury in an auto accident (no witnesses, slightly mysterious). He is near death when rescued. His only relative, his sister, returns to their home town to care for him. As he recovers, however, he regains language and memories but refuses to recognize her as his sister, claiming she is an imposter. Then his dog is an imposter; then his house is not really his house, his mailbox is not where it used to be. He is diagnosed with Capgras, result after brain trauma. Seamlessly woven with this main narrative are musings on the cranes who return to the Dakotas annually and the writings of a famous brain scientist who visits the brother as a medical consultant. It's a great story which kept me riveted.

## Tilton

### Becky Albert

*The Thirteenth Tale* by Diane Setterfield. It is beautifully written and mysterious enough to keep you turning the pages. I thoroughly enjoyed it. Reminded me of a gothic novel, with dark family secrets, an old haunted house, a "spinster" type who spends all of her time reading old books . . . Just the ticket for crisp, dark fall nights.



**Center for the Book**  
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*The mission of the  
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is to celebrate and  
promote reading,  
books, literacy,  
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highlight  
the role that  
reading and  
libraries play in  
enriching  
the lives of the  
people of the  
Granite State.*

## **Book Notes New Hampshire (The Blog)**

*By Mary Russell, Director  
NH Center for the Book*

Social media – wikis, podcasts, blogs, MySpace, YouTube, Flickr, etc. – are a hot topic lately, but they are really a new face on the very old idea that people have things to say to one another. In November 2006, I decided that the New Hampshire Center for the Book should have a blog because as the Director of the NH Center for the Book people tell me all kinds of interesting things and I wanted to share those things with the N.H. book community. I brought the idea to the Center's Advisory Board. They were supportive, some were even enthusiastic, and so I started putting together Book Notes (the blog).

According to Wikipedia (the encyclopedia of the social media world),

a blog is “a user-generated website where entries are made in journal style and displayed in a reverse chronological order. Blogs often provide commentary or news on a particular subject, such as food, politics, or local news; some function as more personal online diaries. A typical blog combines text, images, and links to other blogs, web pages, and other media related to its topic.” They also allow for communication by allowing the people reading them to add comments if the blog author chooses to allow it. Our blog is open for comments from anyone, although they are moderated to avoid spam and such. One of the great things about social media is that much of it is built using tools that are available for free to anyone who wants to use them and can therefore be created without spending a lot (or in our case, without spending anything but time).

Like many blogs, *Book Notes New Hampshire* is a work in progress. It will evolve and change as technology and the NH Center for the Book do. It currently includes news about Center activities, notes on things happening in local libraries and bookstores, occasional news items from the larger book world, and as of January 2007 a “book of the week” which features a book with a Granite State connection that grabbed my attention. I hope you will check out our blog and that you will take a moment to leave a comment and let me know what you think of this latest experiment in communication.

Visit our blog at  
<http://nhbookcenter.blogspot.com>